

Workforce Working Group

Report to Council for New Americans

April 7, 2008

Per its authorization from the Governor's Executive Order, the Workforce Working Group has been focusing on three primary areas:

1. Training and Learning English as a Second Language (ESL)
2. Credentialing of foreign-born professionals and specialists
3. Attracting key workers

1. Training and ESL:

A subcommittee has met a number of times to consider resources related to workforce training and English language instruction. The group has decided to use Maryland State Department of Education - Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation's Adult Education Transition Council report as the foundation for recommendations. This document was selected because it is very recent, had input from numerous stakeholders, and already reflects extensive thinking in the topic. The group also requested and received a presentation of the most recent labor market data from the Governor's Workforce Investment Board. It is also clear that learning English is indispensable for greater economic success and integration and will be a focus for the group.

We request direction from the council on the provision in the Executive Order that calls for study of "...English as a second language, both for the children in the public school system and for working adults. " Although very important, the group generally felt that adding a focus on children might be out of the scope of this particular effort. A focus on programs for adults and older youth might, however, resolve the issue. Please advise.

2. Credentialing and Credential Transfer

Many foreign born professionals from various sectors cite difficulties transferring their formal skill and certifications to the US workforce. Reports abound throughout the economy of many 'misplaced' workers who are highly educated and skilled, but are working here in less skilled professions (engineers as cab drivers, for example). This is a terrible missed opportunity for our state. The foreign nurses training program that has been highlighted is a model, and it is time to expand this statewide in healthcare and other professions. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provides a perfect opportunity to innovate and prepare our state for a new round of competitiveness. At our next meeting we will be hearing from representatives from various licensing boards to discuss ways we can innovate in this area.

3. Attracting key workers

If we are successful in this process to reform Maryland's ability to streamline foreign professional credentialing and have a top notch training, English learning, and workforce system for immigrants, we should 'market' this capacity to attract key professionals worldwide. This will give Maryland a competitive edge in the region for areas like healthcare, and can give us competitive edge nationally competitive in the sciences.